



Paper

Learning Masonic Ritual

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Summary

This presentation has been compiled as a guide to assist the newly Raised Master Mason in learning the ritual.

Keywords

Education, Ritual

An approach to learning Masonic ritual

Having taken the first steps on your Masonic journey, you have now become a Master Mason. The ceremonies of the three Degrees probably still seem confusing and you have now been asked to attend a Lodge of Instruction. This is a challenge, given the long hours and pressure at work and your desire to spend some quality time with your family. It's hard to fit in yet more Masonic activity in addition to the regular Lodge meetings. In addition, you get the impression the other Brethren at your Lodge want you to progress to the Master's Chair, which means having to learn lots of ritual off by heart. What a daunting prospect! How are you going to cope? Why do you have to learn it off by heart anyway? Is it some sort of party piece? Why can't I just read it out?

Let me make some suggestions. The ritual has deep symbolic importance and is designed to convey important and useful messages. In learning it, you are completing the work of a Mason, and it is a major component of the shared experience of Freemasons, helping to bind us together. These suggestions on how you could approach learning the ritual are not intended to replace the advice and guidance of your Lodge Brethren or Officers. Learning ritual can be satisfying and enjoyable if it is structured and approached in the right way. It can help to think of it as part of the 'hobby' side of Masonry, not something that will overwhelm you.

Let's start by taking a look at the overall task. Nobody would attempt to eat an elephant at one sitting, so the first thing to do is to break it down into manageable chunks. Set goals that are small enough to achieve but big enough to make a difference. A 'daily advancement in Masonic knowledge' is the key to this process and this discipline can be invaluable.

Your first action should be to stop passively watching Lodge meetings but to actively observe them instead. Who says what and when? When is the gavel used? What logistics are involved? It can be a lot to take in but you'll see it several times, so it should start to make sense and become familiar to you. It can be easier to concentrate on one or two of the officers at a time, so you can be confident you know what they do and how it fits into the overall ritual. Never be afraid to ask questions of your proposer, seconder, Lodge Mentor or Director of Ceremonies.

Once you feel you have an idea of what's happening, read through your Ritual Book and note where your Lodge diverges from the standard ritual. Most lodges have some subtle differences which give the Lodge its sense of individuality and uniqueness; its 'personality' if you like. It is useful to speak the words out loud as you read, as this reinforces the learning process. Alternatively, record what you are saying and play it back to yourself in your car or on public transport through headphones.

Once you are confident you could open the Lodge in the First-Degree, move on to the Explanation of the Working Tools. For the First-Degree this is just five sentences. The Explanations in the Second and Third Degrees closely resemble the First-Degree in their format, as do the three Obligations, so you should soon be able to spot the similarities and differences.

Once you are confident that you have learned some ritual, keep moving onto new bits. If you have time, try to attend Classes of Instruction. Don't worry if you make mistakes, that is what the Classes are for! Learning ritual is like learning to ride a bike, you can't just rely on theory, you have to do it.

When you come across longer passages, break them down into digestible sentences or phrases and build up a chain of these to form the whole passage. Acronyms and mnemonics (e.g. 'I Drive Cars' for 'Ionic, Doric and Corinthian' (the orders of architecture) or 'Never Eat Shredded Wheat' for the points of the compass) can help.

Take any opportunity you can to volunteer to assist the Director of Ceremonies on the floor in a ceremony. Making ritual more meaningful for Candidates can be enjoyable and rewarding for you and the other Brethren. A truly Masonic experience.

DO's:

- make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge
- actively observe ceremonies in your Lodge
- start the memorising process as soon as you can
- learn a little at a time
- speak the words out loud as you read them to reinforce them
- ask for advice from other Brethren, your Lodge DC and Mentor
- note deviations from standard ritual in your Lodge
- attend rehearsals and Lodges of Instruction if you can
- enjoy your Masonry!

DON'T:

- procrastinate and put off starting the learning process
- passively watch ceremonies without thinking about them
- think you can learn whole passages in one go
- stop when you meet your first big obstacle
- let Brethren make you feel you're letting down the Lodge by not making progress fast enough.

REMEMBER, on average we remember:

20% of what we read; 30% of what we hear; 40% of what we see; 50% of what we say; 60% of what we do; and 90% of what we hear, say see and do!

##END##

Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by ‘any questions’
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling’s dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his ‘serving men’, as follows: *‘I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who’.*

Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

For further papers and other learning materials visit “Solomon” at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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